

**CONTACTS**

Liz Sharlot, Kelly French, Elizabeth Hogue  
601-576-7667

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570 East Woodrow Wilson • Box 1700  
Jackson, MS 39215-1700  
[www.HealthyMS.com](http://www.HealthyMS.com)



Mississippi Department of Health

# NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION**

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## **\*\*HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS INFORMATION SHEET \*\* HEALTH DEPARTMENT WARNS OF RISKS BEFORE THE STORM**

Hurricane readiness should begin long before the even occurs. The Mississippi Department of Health (MDH) advises that residents use preparation tips before the storm, so lives can be saved and illness prevented.

### **Prepare for a Weather Emergency**

- Identify potential home hazards that could develop during a hurricane, such as those involving gas, electricity, chemicals and structural damage.
- Provide escape ladders for multi-story structures.
- Establish an assembly point where the family meets in the event of a hurricane when the family is not together at home.
- Give your relatives and friends the name of a contact person who will know where you are and how you are doing.
- Instruct family members about how to shut off the gas, water and electric mains.
- Know the location of your important papers, such as insurance policies, wills, licenses, stocks.
- Inform local authorities about any special needs, for example, elderly or bedridden people or anyone with a disability.

### **Food safety: Preventing Food-Borne Diseases**

- The Mississippi Department of Health (MDH) advises throwing away all fresh food including fruits, vegetables and other produce that can become submerged.
- Throw away all screw cap or crimp cap containers that can become submerged.
- Discard any cold or cool food that has warmed and food that is still frozen or cold (45 degrees Fahrenheit or less) is safe to prepare.
- MDH advises that individuals should not eat any food that may have come into contact with contaminated water from floods or tidal surges.
- Commercially prepared cans of food should not be eaten if there is a bulging or opening on the can or the screw caps, soda pop bottle tops or twist-caps.
- Undamaged, commercially canned foods can be saved if you remove the labels and then disinfect the cans in a bleach solution. Use  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach in one gallon of water; re-label the cans including expiration date and type of food. Assume that home-canned food is unsafe.
- Infants should be fed only pre-prepared canned baby formula. Do not use powdered formulas prepared with treated water. Use boiled water when preparing formula.

## **Sanitation and Hygiene: Preventing Waterborne Illness**

Contamination levels, if any, vary among water systems. If your area is officially notified that emergency water purification is necessary, the MDH advises the following:

- Vigorously boil water for at least a full minute before using.
- Treat chemically by adding unscented chlorine bleach in these amounts: two drops of bleach for each quart of clear water or four drops of bleach for each quart of muddy or dirty water. Let the water stand at least 30 minutes before using.
- Basic hygiene is very important during this emergency period. Always wash your hands with soap and water that has been boiled or disinfected before eating, after toilet use, after participating in cleanup activities and after handling articles contaminated by floodwater or sewage.
- Flooding that occurs after the hurricane may mean that water contains fecal matter from sewage systems, agricultural and industrial waste and septic tanks. If you have open cuts or sores exposed to the floodwater, keep them as clean as possible by washing them with soap and clean water. Apply antibiotic ointment to reduce the risk of infection. If a wound or sore develops redness, swelling or drainage, see a physician.
- Do not allow children to play in floodwater. They can be exposed to water contaminated with fecal matter. Do not allow children to play with toys that have been in floodwater until the toys have been disinfected. Use  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of bleach in one gallon of water.

## **Power Outages: Preventing Fire Hazards**

- Using battery-powered lanterns and flashlights is preferable to using candles.
- If you must use candles, make sure you put them in safe holders away from curtains, paper, wood, or other flammable items.

## **Clearing Standing Water: Preventing Mosquito-Borne Illness**

- Heavy rains and flooding can lead to an increase in mosquitoes. Mosquitoes are most active at sunrise and sunset. Public health authorities will be working actively to control the spread of any diseases transmitted by mosquitoes.
- To protect against mosquitoes, MDH urges the public to remain diligent in their personal mosquito protection efforts. These should include the 4 D's for prevention:
  - **Dusk and Dawn** -- Avoid being outdoors when mosquitoes are seeking blood, for many species this is during the dusk and dawn hours.
  - **Dress** -- Wear clothing that covers skin.
  - **DEET** -- When the potential exists for exposure to mosquitoes, repellents containing DEET (N,N-diethyl-meta-toluamide, or N,N-diethyl-3-methylbenzamide) are recommended. In addition to those containing DEET, insect repellents including the ingredients picaridin and oil of lemon eucalyptus in mosquito repellents are recommended for use on human skin. Always read the manufacturer's directions carefully before you put on a repellent.
  - **Drainage** -- Check your home to rid it of standing water in which mosquitoes can lay their eggs.

## **Tips on Eliminating Mosquito Breeding Sites**

- Clean out eaves, troughs and gutters.
- Remove old tires or drill holes in those used in playgrounds to drain.
- Turn over or remove empty plastic pots.
- Pick up all beverage containers and cups.
- Check tarps on boats or other equipment that may collect water.
- Pump out bilges on boats.
- Replace water in birdbaths and pet or other animal feeding dishes at least once a week.
- Change water in plant trays, including hanging plants, at least once a week.
- Remove vegetation or obstructions in drainage ditches that prevent the flow of water.

For more information on emergency preparation, visit the MDH website at [www.HealthyMS.com](http://www.HealthyMS.com) or contact the Mississippi Department of Health toll-free 24 hours a day, seven days a week at 1-866-HLTHY 4 U (1-866-458-4948.)